

XA MAT

The site of the village of Xa Mat is in northern Tay Ninh Province adjacent to the South Vietnam - Cambodia border, at a road junction about 30 miles north of Tay Ninh city. The principal road, QL 22, extends from Tay Ninh city to the Xa Mat location where it connects with the Cambodian route leading to Kampong Cham, a major port on the Mekong River (see 1:250,000 map).

The village of Xa Mat has been destroyed and there are presently no villages in South Vietnam within a 10 to 12 mile radius of its former location. The only signs of possible habitation are the numerous sites of military encampments and fortifications found at strategic locations along Route QL 22. In April 1972 ARVN forces abandoned this key border entry point and the area now is under NVA control. Most of the civilian population of northern Tay Ninh Province has been relocated to refugee camps around Tay Ninh city; those who remain are Viet Cong or Communist sympathizers.

As there are no villages or significant agricultural areas in northern Tay Ninh, supplies will probably have to be brought in from Tay Ninh city. The 30-mile drive from the city to Xa Mat is along an all-weather, natural surface road -- highway QL 22. (The road is subject to flooding during the rainy season, but its surface drains rapidly and resupply should not be hindered significantly.) Driving time could take as much as 2 hours, however, depending upon the status of the road since

the heavy fighting of 1972. In the immediate area north of Ap Trai Bi the road was bombed extensively, but repairs are easy in this area and the NVA may have the road in operable condition. More serious problems may occur if the bridge over the Suoi Ky is out; passage across the river appears to be difficult even during the dry season. The road has been cleared of all forest for several hundred feet on either side; in some areas the route passes through high elephant grass (see Sketch Map). QL 22 is lined with circular strongpoints or evacuated military encampments from about 8 miles north of Tay Ninh city to the Cambodian border.

East-west roads that connect with QL 22 near Xa Mat such as 246, LTL 20, and 247 are all partly fair-weather roads of varying trafficability. Route 246 linking Xa Mat and Katum is fair-weather a few miles northeast of Xa Mat; then it becomes a trail that has been extensively damaged. Route LTL 20 is probably jeepable to the Cambodian border during the dry season. Route 247 was extensively damaged and may be "rough going" for anything but tracked vehicles even during the dry season (see 1:100,000 map).

An airfield has been carved out of QL 22 about 5 miles south of Xa Mat, near the area of the former Special Forces camp. The strip is natural surface but probably well-drained; its serviceability is unknown. Another airstrip at Ap Trai Bi is almost certainly unserviceable. Resupply by helicopter seems to be the most logical alternative unless the airstrip at the former Special Forces camp has been maintained by the North Vietnamese Army.

Helicopter use of the roads and airstrip is possible during the wet season. A number of low-lying open areas are available as helicopter landing zones; some, however, would be inundated during the rainy season.

Northern Tay Ninh Province is an area of flat to undulating terrain, lying at a general elevation of 65 to 70 feet above sea level. The location of Xa Mat, at higher elevations than the Mekong lowlands to the south, permits sufficient drainage to allow relatively easy movement on foot during all seasons. Vegetation in the Xa Mat area varies from grasslands to multi-storied forests (see Sketch Map). In general, the grasslands exist as clearings interspersed through the forests, but there are extensive areas of elephant grass, which may grow as high as 10 feet, with scattered trees. (Personnel moving through a thick stand of tall elephant grass will not be observable from ground level.) The forests are a combination of deciduous and broadleaf evergreen trees. The forest canopy formed by the crowns of broadleaf evergreen trees of different heights is often so dense as to prevent any aerial observation of ground activity. The marshes and swamps in the general area of Xa Mat tend to "dry up" during the winter dry season.

Xa Mat receives most of its rainfall between the months of May and October when monsoon winds bring rain from the southwest. Precipitation, which occurs principally as showers from early afternoon to late evening, amounts from 65 to 85 inches in this season. The combination of high relative humidity and high

temperatures that characterizes the summer months can be extremely oppressive; afternoon temperatures average near 90 and the mean relative humidity for these months averages around 80 percent. As maximum cloud cover occurs during the rainy season, the area may be "socked in" for several days at a time, prohibiting resupply by air.

The dry season in Xa Mat occurs from December through March when the area receives less than 3 inches of rainfall. Although temperatures decrease only a few degrees in this period, the climate becomes more tolerable as relative humidity levels normally drop to 50 percent during the afternoon hours. Temperatures sharply rise and may reach 100°F, however, during the 2 months (March and April) preceding the onset of the monsoon. Dust on the natural surface roads, airstrips, and in the base camps is considerable during the dry season.

In early 1973 northern Tay Ninh Province was a Communist stronghold with NVA headquarters reported at Xa Mat and Katum. Supplies were floated down the Mekong River to drop off points south of Kampong Cham, Cambodia. From here they were trans-shipped across Cambodia to large base areas along the South Vietnam - Cambodia border. One of these base areas was in Cambodia immediately adjacent to Xa Mat (see 1:250,000 scale map). A larger area lies 20 miles northwest of Tay Ninh city, around Kampong Trach, Cambodia. From Kampong Trach men and supplies were infiltrated down the Vam Co Dong River, through the Straight Edge Woods to south of Tay Ninh city (see

1:250,000 scale map). Other staging areas were along the border northeast and northwest of Katum. Numerous infiltration trails and one possible fair-weather road extend south from route 246 between Xa Mat and Katum. Other networks cross the Cambodian border southwest of Xa Mat and link with QL 22.

Live North Vietnamese booby traps and possible ARVN minefields are scattered throughout the northern Tay Ninh region. An extensively booby-trapped area lies north of Nui Ba Den (mountain), located about 7 miles northeast of Tay Ninh city (see 1:250,000 scale map). Grenades, artillery shells and unexploded B-52 bombs can be found in this minefield. Trails through the minefield are known only to the NVA.

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Special ForcesCamp/Thien Ngon

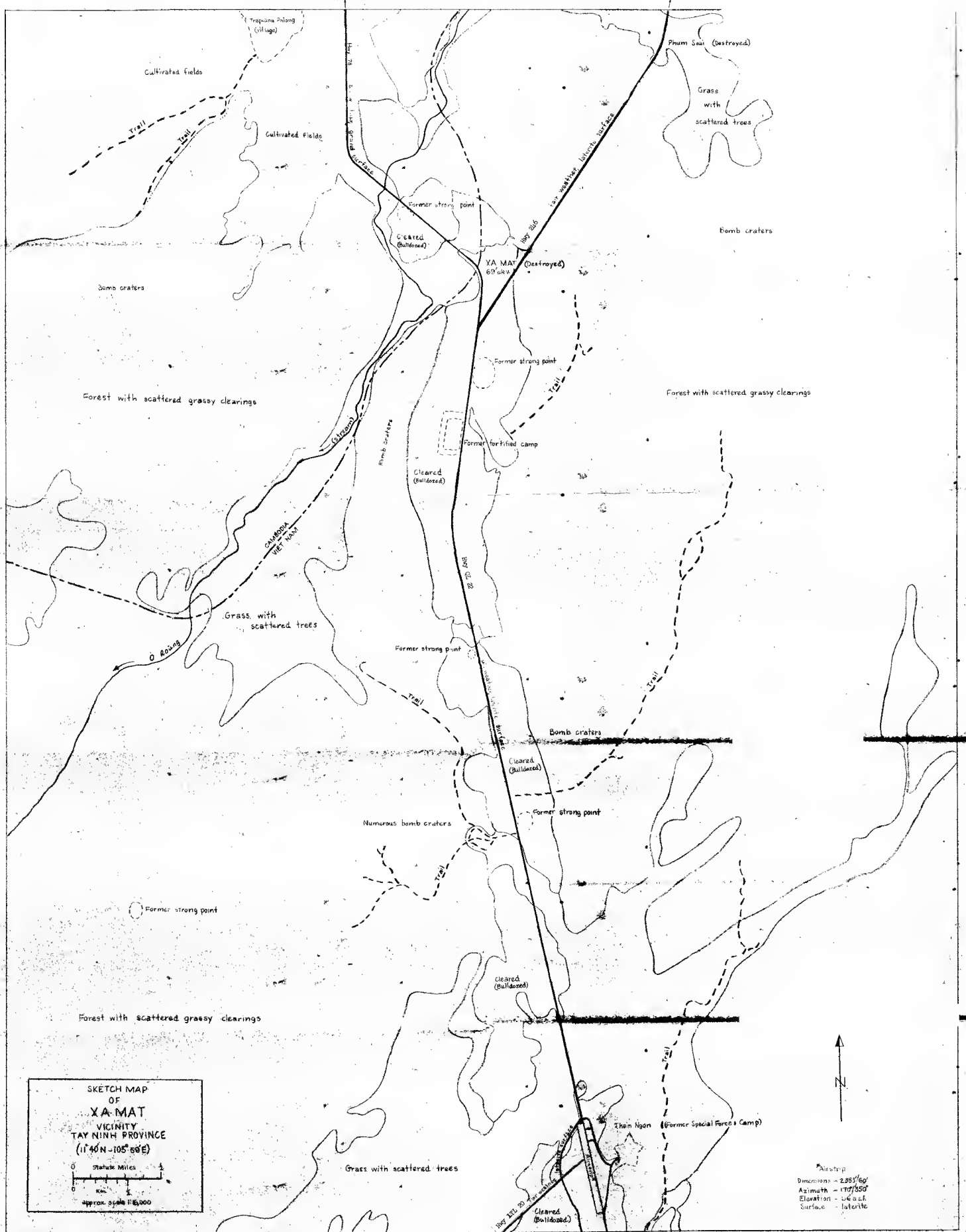
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